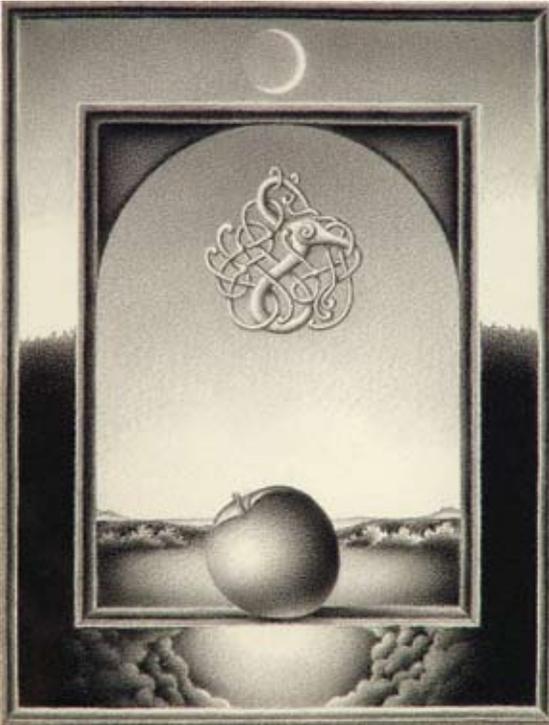




## The Values of Drawing

Blair Benz, Larassa Kabel, Justin Meyers, J. Marlene Mueller, Jan Zelfer-Redmond

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Drawing is among the activities that most of us began doing earlier than our memories can recall. While the lines and scribbles of our toddler years were cute for our parents, as long as they were not cleaning them off of the walls or furniture, those marks were important steps in helping us understand both written language and the shapes that define our three-dimensional world. Because children do it and many of the materials of drawing are familiar to us, drawing too often seems easy and inconsequential. Drawing is what we do for games, to kill time during long meetings or phone conversations, or to give someone a basic visual idea of what we are trying to describe.

*The Values of Drawing* brings together five artists living in Iowa, Nebraska, and South Dakota, each of whom has committed a significant amount of time on drawings in recent years. The subjects, styles, and working methods vary from artist to artist. Their artworks show us the wide range of possibilities when artists begin working with a single mark on a sheet of paper. As indicated by the title of this exhibition, value is perhaps the most important element for artists to consider when creating a drawing.

Value refers to the use of light and dark colors within an artwork. In the drawings included in this exhibition, the values are easy to find simply by comparing the light, dark, and medium tones in each artwork. Works such as charcoal drawings or black-and-white photography are defined almost exclusively by their values and lines. Each artist in this exhibition uses lights and darks in dramatic ways.

Value can refer, though, to some of the characteristics of drawings that make them so special. In comparison to



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many other areas of art, drawing seems to be a more direct reflection of the process that the artist takes along the way. Artist Justin Meyers sums this up very nicely when he says, "The pencil has always felt like an extension of my own hand." As viewers and as frequent users of pens, pencils, and other drawing implements, we can sense this direct connection to the artist and what he or she is feeling while working.

The artists participating in this exhibition value their drawing mediums for specific reasons:

Blair Benz of Monticello, Iowa, creates perfectly crafted, intimate charcoal drawings that present objects in a somewhat theatrical manner, heightened dramatically by his ability to achieve a sense of depth in his images. Benz works exclusively in drawing, using charcoal as his primary medium.

"Early on, I worked exclusively with graphite. I love the soft, gray values, but its range is much more compressed toward the lighter end of the scale than that of charcoal. And you just have to love those velvety blacks that you can get from a good compressed charcoal. So, now I work primarily with charcoal, both pencils and compressed charcoal, and only occasionally use graphite for the lightest, most subtle value areas."

Larassa Kabel of Des Moines, Iowa, has worked in paints and printmaking techniques during her career, but has focused on drawing in the last couple of years because of the ideas she has been exploring. She works toward the creation of visual solutions to "niggling questions."



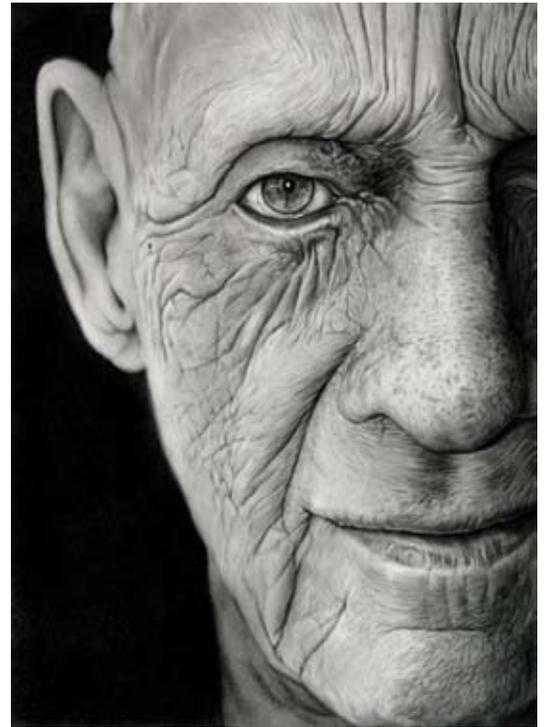
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“I work almost exclusively in colored pencil right now because of the level of richness that it gives me. Graphite is too silvery. I love that I can get so detailed with it, that it won’t smudge easily, and that I can manipulate it with rubbing alcohol to create a wash for covering large areas and making very deep blacks. I’ve used colored pencils for a long time, so they are familiar and comfortable to me; plus they allow for a high level of articulation which I love. Fur can look just like fur if the pencil point is sharp enough to be the width of a hair.”

Justin Meyers of Blair, Nebraska, works in both charcoal and graphite in a straightforward, yet unsparingly intense manner, whether working on portraits or still-life images. Meyers works exclusively in drawing, though his formal training was in painting.

“I have always been attracted to drawing in graphite, charcoal, ballpoint pen etc., due mostly to the sheer simplicity of the medium. I like the idea that the viewers of the works, no matter how limited or extensive their knowledge of art and art materials may be, can always relate to what I am using—we are all familiar with a #2 pencil or a pen that we use during our ordinary life in a simple manner. If I can turn this simple tool into something that creates a bit of awe or bewilderment for a few moments, I like that.”

J. Marlene Mueller of Wayne, Nebraska, has studied the combinations of fire, smoke, and wood in large images that are rich and beautiful notwithstanding the subject matter. She has spent most of her career working as a painter. When she became a volunteer firefighter, she began photographing and drawing some of the skills firefighters are expected to demonstrate.



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“My medium of choice is charcoal. Varying grades of hard and soft pencils (both white and black) and sticks together with techniques using Q-tips, cotton balls, chamois, erasers, and tortillions (paper stumps to blend drawing marks) further the range of values and textures I can achieve. I find that I am drawn to the colder, richer super blacks that imitate the charred surfaces of wood and the soot that surrounds the fire scene. The use of such charred wood in my hand recalls the emotional and sensuous aspects of sight, smell and temperatures. More recently, to symbolically reference the heat aspect of fire, I have been using a range of warm colored Conté crayons and pencils.”

Jan Zelfer-Redmond of Jefferson, South Dakota, uses drawing mediums much more for pure mark-making or shaping an atmosphere, rather than for a depiction of people or things. She paints and draws, sometimes focusing on one or the other, and sometimes working on both. The advantage she gains from drawing is that she can concentrate more on “seeing.”

“I love the immediacy, the looseness, and the messiness of soft charcoals and soft graphites, and Conté crayons. I also love the crispness of the harder mediums. I use all of them for different purposes when I draw. They are also unforgiving and forgiving at the same time and I use that aspect for different effects. I like making marks that are hard and definite, and I like making marks that are vague and shadowy. I like marks that question and marks that state. The most challenging of any medium is when to leave well enough alone!”

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cover

J. Marlene Mueller, *Apocalypse*, 2008, charcoal on paper, 32 x 44 inches, courtesy of the artist

back cover

Larassa Kabel, *The Hazards of Love – Frisky*, 2009, colored pencil on paper, 25.5 x 38.5 inches, courtesy of the artist

1. Blair Benz, (*The Divine Comedies*) *Falling from Grace*, 2008, charcoal on paper, 7.5 x 6 inches, courtesy of Olson-Larsen Galleries, West Des Moines, IA
2. Jan Zelfer-Redmond, *Untitled*, 2012, acrylic paint, Conté crayon, graphite, oil crayon on paper, 28.25 x 22.25 inches, courtesy of the artist
3. Larassa Kabel, *Any Minute Now – Flyboy*, 2011, colored pencil on paper, 9 x 9 feet, courtesy of the artist
4. Justin Meyers, *Mr. Bill*, 2008, charcoal on paper, 30 x 22 inches, courtesy of Modern Arts Midtown, Omaha, NE